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RECOLLECTIONS AND ANTICIPATIONS.

A

HALF-CENTURY

AND

DEDICATORY DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN

NEW-BRAINTREE, MASS. church

1846. Oct. 26.

OCTOBER 26, 1846.

BY JOHN FISKE,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.



GREENFIELD:
MERRIAM AND MIRICK, PRINTERS.
1846.



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NEW BRAINTREE, Oct. 28, 1846.

REV. DR. FISKE,

SIR:—The Congregational Parish in New Braintree, through their Committee, present you their thanks for the interesting Semi-Centennial Discourse, delivered by you, at the dedication of their Meeting-house, and request of you the additional gratification of a copy for the press.

With much respect,

Your obedient servants,

SAMUEL MIXTER,
WELCOME NEWELL,
AMORY FELTON,
} *Com. of the
Parish.*

GENTLEMEN:

In compliance with your request, I will furnish you with a copy of my Sermon, as soon as may be convenient.

Yours with great respect,

JOHN FISKE.

To HON. SAMUEL MIXTER, &c.

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S E R M O N.

1 THESSALONIANS, ii : 19.—For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing ? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming ?

IT is very generally, not to say universally, agreed, that either of the two occasions which have called together this numerous assembly demands from a Christian people some public expression of gratitude to God. We derive evidence from the highest authority, that when a new place is opened for public worship, it is the duty of those for whose benefit it was prepared, to consecrate it, by prayer and other religious exercises, to the sacred use for which it was designed. The example of Solomon on the completion of the temple commends itself to every man's reason, and the remarkable display of God's approbation on the occasion affords full evidence that it was in accordance with his will.

Although we have neither precept nor example touching the manner in which any period that a minister may have continued with his people should be noticed, yet the completion of half a century is so unusual an event, and so fraught with results affecting

their temporal and spiritual welfare, as to be justly deemed worthy of special acknowledgment to the God of providence. If such protracted connection has been as happy and beneficial as it is uncommon, there is certainly abundant cause for gratitude by both pastor and people. When these two occasions happen at the same time, which perhaps may never have been the case before this day, the obligations for fervent thanksgivings are doubly increased.

There is also another circumstance interesting to the speaker, although it may not be particularly so to others. This is the anniversary not only of my installation* over this church and society, but also of my birth. As I enter on the fifty-first year of my ministry, in this place, I commence the seventy-seventh of my life—a solemn memento that the time when I must give account of my stewardship must be near at hand. In view of these two admonitory circumstances, I would speak on this occasion, as I ought, did I know it to be my valedictory discourse to the people of my charge.

I have stated that the results of a connection between a minister and people, for so long a period, must be highly important. Whether those results are good or evil, for weal or for wo, the remark will apply in either case with equal truth.

Let us suppose that when one is constituted a pastor, the fact should be made known to those who are to live under his ministry, that he will continue with them, as their spiritual guide and teacher for fifty

* See Appendix (A).

years, they, at the same time being ignorant of the character of his ministry, further than they may have formed a judgment of it, from a few weeks' acquaintance, during his probation among them. What deep and painful solicitude must agitate their minds, in view of such a fact. How would hope and fear alternate in their bosoms, as they should contemplate the consequences of the protracted connection in anticipation, involving to a great extent the present and future happiness, not only of themselves, but of their children and children's children. For he who continues fifty years in the ministry in the same place will have an important agency in the moral and religious training of three generations, and before that period shall be half exhausted, the saying of the prophet, "Like people, like priest," will be verified. Let his religious sentiments and views be what they may, such also will theirs be, so far as they are satisfied with him as their teacher. His standard of piety and morals will be theirs also. The great body of the people will be won over to the truth, or seduced by the errors, which will have been inculcated for more than half the period of human life. How unspeakably important then is a fifty years' ministry, by one man, among the same people. The anticipation or the review of such a ministry may well cause one to tremble.

Through the forbearance of God, and of this church and society, I am one of the few, who have been permitted to live and to sustain the pastoral office in the same place for a full half century. I am henceforward to speak of it, as matter of history and not as future.

It would be deemed an unpardonable omission, if on the present occasion, I should not bring into view some of the more important events which have transpired among us, since our connection, and notice the changes which affect our condition, especially in respect to religion. Such omission would not only disappoint the expectations of most that are present, but entirely defeat one of the ends proposed by this meeting.

I would also lead forward your minds to the time when the connection which has so long and so happily existed will be dissolved, your pastor being gathered to his fathers, or released from his labors by reason of age or infirmity.

But I would premise, "that we are little among the thousands of Judah." The population of the town being but about seven hundred and fifty, it must be borne in mind that other things will be graduated on a corresponding scale.

Previous to the brief review of past events which I propose to take, I shall make several remarks on the state of this church fifty years ago, some of which will strangely contrast with its present condition. These remarks will also apply to many other churches in the vicinity, and throughout the state.

In the first place, I remark, that at the time to which allusion has been made, the practice of baptizing the children of those who desired it, although they did not come to the table of the Lord, was allowed in this church, as in many others—probably a major part in this vicinity. I mention this not merely as a historical fact, but as tending to show the kind overrulings

of Providence toward us, in the peaceful removal of a practice to which many were strongly attached, but which is now considered as founded in error, and as tending to evil, both to the churches and individuals concerned. I continued the practice in respect to such as had been permitted to offer them in time past, for a number of years. But in regard to others who might desire the same thing, they were to be considered by the church as in such connection with it, that they might at any time come to the table of the Lord, and were to be under its watch, and subject to its discipline, like members in full communion. The adoption of this regulation nearly broke up the practice. In eighteen hundred and ten it was entirely abolished by the unanimous vote of the church.

Another remark is, that fifty years ago, it was an unusual thing that any duty of a devotional character was performed, even by professors of religion, except in their own families, especially in presence of their pastor. It was not until I had been in this place more than eleven years, that I was permitted to hear a sentence of prayer offered by one of my people. The occasion of that new and delightful sound was this. I had been requested to attend the funeral of a colored man, but by reason of a powerful rain I was detained so far beyond the appointed hour, that it was thought I should fail of coming. Being unwilling to bury their dead without prayer, the friends and neighbors requested a professor of religion who was present, to perform that duty. He complied with the request. As I arrived before the close of the prayer, I enjoyed the privilege of listening to the latter part of it. If I

ever felt any gratitude to God, it was never more in exercise than on that occasion.*

But it was not that there were no Christians at that day, or that they lived without prayer, that I present you with such a sad picture of the times. But the reason was, in part at least, that it was generally considered as the special duty and privilege of the pastor to do all the praying, when he was present. This was designed as a mark of respect to the Christian ministry. During all that time, and so far as I ever learned, under the ministry of my predecessor, there was not a social prayer meeting in this place. It was much after this fashion in most other churches.

The aged and infirm who were unable to go to the house of God, used frequently to request their minister to preach a lecture at their houses. But there was only one voice heard in the assembly, directed to God or the people.

Neither ministers nor churches would now think that they could afford to live in this way.

Another remark is, that churches at the time here spoken of consisted almost entirely of persons in married life, and most of them far advanced in years. At the time of my settlement there was but one member of the church in single life,—a female about fifty-five years of age. There was not a young person to be seen at the table of the Lord, when his people sat down to commemorate the love he manifested in giving his life a ransom for all. It seemed to be the general understanding, if we may judge

* See Appendix (B).

from the prevalent practice, that when the better sort of persons had settled down in a family state, and children were born to them, they ought to connect themselves with the church. The dedication of children to God in the ordinance of baptism was, at that day, viewed as a more important duty, than by many at this time. The neglect of it was considered as an implied renunciation of the gospel, and as an approximation toward heathenism; and I doubt not but a sense of that parental obligation led many to a serious consideration concerning their own souls, which was to them a means of salvation. Such as were not satisfied with placing themselves under the “half-way covenant” as it was called, were in many instances urged on to the performance of their whole duty, by their own consciences and the Spirit of God, to confess Christ before men in a consistent way. But as for the young, it was not expected by minister or people, that they would consent to so unnatural an act, as to unite with a church consisting only of married and to a great extent aged persons.

There was much to produce this apprehension in the minds of youth, particularly the manner in which that ordinance by which Christians do show the Lord’s death was celebrated. The church instead of being as a city set on a hill, in that transaction was rather in conclave. At the close of the morning’s exercises the congregation was blessed and dismissed by the pastor, which seemed to imply that in the remaining duties about to be performed in the church, the major part of the assembly had no concern. The consequence was, that most of those who lived near the

house of worship, went to their homes, while others, especially the youth, sought for entertainment where it best pleased them. This most solemn and interesting gospel ordinance was either administered in haste, because the time was short, or the intermission was lengthened, so as to render it tedious to those without. There can be no doubt but the day on which the Lord's supper was to be administered was looked upon with a kind of dread by not a few, on account of these most inappropriate circumstances.

Such was the practice here, for I know not how many years. One thing I do know, that it was as long as my conscience would allow me to proceed in this manner.

Since we have made the administration of this ordinance the exercise for the afternoon, our meetings have been more fully attended, and a deeper interest has been manifested, than on almost any other occasion.

Such was the condition of this church and people when in the providence of God, I took the oversight of them as their pastor. I look back to that time with feelings which cannot be described, as I consider my inexperience, and want of preparation for the great work in which I was engaging. Though ignorant of what was before me, the Lord was pleased to lead me in a way that I knew not.

It was my understanding then, as now, that my principal business as a minister of Christ would consist in a faithful dispensation of all that is contained in his gospel, or the word of God. Although my views in respect to several points of doctrine varied from what they are at the present time, and as I now

believe were very defective in comparison with what they became after the lapse of a few years, yet so far as I know my own heart, it was my purpose from the beginning to preach all that the bible teaches, keeping back nothing that God has commanded his ministers to publish as truth. I have endeavored to make known all his counsel to others, so far as he has been pleased to make me acquainted with it.

The doctrines which I have considered as fundamental to the great plan of salvation revealed in the gospel, and on which I have more frequently discoursed are, the character of God as infinitely wise, good, sovereign and unchangeable ; subsisting in three persons, equal in power and glory ; the complete ruin of man in consequence of the apostasy ; the entire depravity of his nature ; his recovery by the sacrifice of Christ, who was made sin for us ; his dependence on the Holy Spirit for the renewal of his heart unto holiness, according to the election of grace ; justification by faith alone ; and the necessity of good works as the fruit and only sufficient evidence of the reality of that moral change which prepares a sinner for salvation. I have had a growing conviction of the importance of these doctrines, because they appear to me to stand out with great prominence on the pages of God's word, and because universal experience shows that they are the principal means of salvation to sinners.

In connection with the public dispensation of the word and ordinances on the Lord's day, like most of my brethren, I have made use of other means to promote the spiritual welfare of my people, such as lec-

tures during the week, in every part of the town, conferences, pastoral visits, addresses to parents and to children in separate meetings, social prayer meetings, bible classes, personal conversation, to which I must add, "and such like." For all is not included in what has been named.

While I most sensibly feel that in all things I have come short—far short of my duty, and in some points have been faulty, it would be ungrateful in me to say, that my imperfect labors have been productive of no spiritual good to my people. This would be to overlook, rather than to magnify the grace of God.

It was just two years after my settlement before one made a profession of religion. The time was long and dreary. But for each succeeding twenty-one years, with one exception, there were some additions to the church by profession. The second person who offered herself as a professed follower of Christ, was under eighteen years of age. As there is reason to believe from her subsequent life, she was moved to this duty by the Spirit of God.

This was viewed as a strange thing among us. As might be supposed, it occasioned a new train of thinking in many hearts, and resulted in good. In several succeeding years four and five united with the church, some of whom were young persons, male and female.

In the year 1809, the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon the minds of many in this place, in an unusual manner, and continued its gracious work from two to three years. In the first year nine made profession of their faith in Christ, five of whom were youth, four at one time. The next year sixteen were

added to the church by profession, and twenty in the year following—in the aggregate forty-five.

In 1818-19, we enjoyed the most extensive revival of religion, with which this people was ever blessed. The number that was gathered into the fold of Christ, as the fruits of that revival, was over ninety, consisting of persons of all ages and conditions, and from every part of the town. The next season of special refreshing from the presence of the Lord was in 1826, when the church had an accession of thirty. In 1831, twenty-five became professors, and forty-three in our last season of revival, which was four years ago. Besides these, there have been several other times of unusual attention to religion, when smaller numbers were brought to own the Lord that bought them.

As soon as these manifestations of the Divine Spirit were enjoyed among us, the character of the church was greatly changed, in various respects. A large portion of those who were admitted to its fellowship were youth. Social prayer meetings became frequent, in which the voices of young men, as well as the more aged were heard, in thanksgiving and supplication to that God whose grace they hoped had brought them out of the dark pit of sin and misery, into the glorious liberty of the gospel. Our choir of singers invariably felt a favorable influence from all the revivals we ever enjoyed, and this influence was reflected back upon the whole assembly. In several instances, nearly the whole number was brought into the kingdom of Christ, when there did not seem before to be scarcely any who had the fear of the Lord in their hearts.

The whole number that I have received into this church is three hundred and fifty-nine; three hundred and five by profession, and fifty-four by letter.

Although this number may appear small, and although some of these who seemed for a season to run well were afterward hindered, yet my heart is greatly cheered, "and my soul doth magnify the Lord," as I review the record of God's gracious dealings with us. While I can see many things which were not as they should have been, yet I cannot but indulge the hope, that most of those names were written in the book of life, and that they have already joined the redeemed saints in glory, or remain as lights in the world. Numbers have died in the triumphs of faith, whose final victory it has been my privilege to witness, and nearly all who have been called to leave the world, have enjoyed a hope that sustained and comforted them as they saw the approach of the king of terrors. I rejoice to see the names of five of my own children placed on the list of members in this church at different periods, who, as I hope, remain steadfast in their profession. One is not, God having taken her to himself.

To every faithful pastor, the church that has grown up under his fostering care, is inexpressibly dear to him. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" And I believe it proper to say, even now it is so. The church in which a minister has labored long, and which he has been principally instrumental in forming, is a commentary on his own character. It is an epistle known

and read of all men. This epistle will be opened in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

There is a constant drain from this church by emigration. While only fifty-four have come to us from other churches, a hundred and twenty-nine have gone out from us, making a balance against us of seventy-five. On the return made in June last, the number of members stood at only one hundred and forty-five—forty-one males and one hundred and four females, having been much reduced since our last revival, which was only four years ago.

What more touching ministerial act can be named than that of placing the seal of God's covenant on such as make a profession of their faith in Christ, or on their infant seed? On five hundred and sixty-three have I been permitted to place this seal—eighty-four of whom were adults and four hundred and seventy-nine in a state of minority.

On how many occasions of joy and sorrow, have I been called into your families, to mingle my sympathies with you, in seasons of intense interest, and to perform appropriate religious service. The celebration of a marriage, as a general thing, is one of those occasions which tend to strengthen the cords of affliction between a minister and his people. There is scarcely a house in the town where I have not been called on that pleasing occasion, and into most of them not only once, but again and again. I have joined in marriage three hundred and six couples.

But it is on occasions of domestic affliction that the hearts of minister and people melt and mingle, and become cemented as one. When he is called to

bow the knee beside the bed of sickness, or death, in the midst of sorrowing friends, where he pleads with God to spare the life of a dear companion, parent, or child, or to receive the departing spirit to the bosom of infinite love, or when he comes to administer consolation after death has done its dreadful work, the labors of a gospel minister are most appreciated. Never, till eternity shall declare it, can it be known how many times I have been summoned into your families on such occasions. There have been five hundred and ninety-seven deaths in the place; the funerals, with very few exceptions, I have attended. Usually several, in some cases many visits were made previous to death.

And what desolations have been produced in our community by the last enemy! There is not a single member of the church over which I was settled among the living. They are all in their graves. It is seventeen years since I followed the last male member to the house appointed for all the living, and it is more than two years since the last female deceased.

There is but a single husband and wife now living, whom I found connected in marriage when I was constituted the pastor of this people. There are members in that choir of singers, and certainly one in the church, deriving their origin from different ancestors, whose great grandfathers took an active part in my settlement. One of them officiated nine years as a deacon under my ministry, and died four years after resigning his office, a younger man than I am, at the present time.

These facts may serve to suggest to our minds other

corresponding changes which might be named.* But churches and societies do not become extinct, though the individuals of whom they were composed may be joined to the dead. It is known to all, that within the period of the last fifty years, the calls upon ministers, by reason of peculiar trials that have prevailed in the churches, especially in this state, have been very numerous. I may add also, that a strange instability and fickleness in the people, have been the occasion of large demands on their time, in other churches and parishes than their own. I have often thought that our congregations must be wearied by hearing "Letters Missive" read with such frequency as has been the case. I have been called to attend one hundred and twenty-one councils, and have been present at about one hundred and fourteen or fifteen. Sixty of those councils were for the purpose of installing pastors, and about thirty for dismissing them. The residue were for the formation of churches, or the settlement of existing difficulties.

The charge of district schools has occupied much time, and called for no small degree of labor. In the former part of my ministry these duties were prescribed by the state, and latterly by the appointment of the town as one of their committee. I have considered this as matter of great importance, and toilsome as it has been, have endeavored to discharge the duties involved, with fidelity. It has been my object to raise the standard of education from year to year, by requiring as high qualifications in teachers, as it

* See Appendix (C).

would do to insist on, by visiting the schools, without distinction, as nearly in conformity to the requisitions of law as circumstances would permit, and by doing all the good to them that was in my power. In these attempts I have been nobly sustained by other members of the committee, since committeees have been appointed. The town has been accustomed to make liberal grants of money for the support of schools. By the last "Abstract of the Massachusetts School Returns," it appears that New Braintree raises \$4.82 to the scholar, which, after taking out Boston and six neighboring towns, where the expense of education is much greater than in the interior, exceeds any other town in the state. The sum raised for schooling, the last year, was no higher than it has been for a number of years past.

There have been fifteen publicly educated men from this town, three before my residence here and twelve since. Besides these, two died in college, and two are now in college. Eight have entered the ministry in the Congregational order, and one in the Baptist denomination, a popular preacher and highly esteemed. I refer to Dr. Davis, who closed his ministry at Hartford, Connecticut, a number of years ago, much lamented. We have also furnished to the country six lawyers, five of whom are now living.*

The fifty years in which it has been my privilege to labor in the ministry, has been a most eventful period to the church and the world. In the former part, political revolutions were almost every where taking

* See Appendix (D).

place. Infidelity spread with astonishing rapidity ; and a very extensive combination was formed to establish principles which would subvert not only all Christian institutions, but the foundations of civil society. The darkness of the middle ages seemed to be returning upon the civilized world, and next to nothing was doing to cause the light of the gospel to shine among the benighted. Religion was generally in a very low state, partaking much of formalism, and the prospect was continually gathering darkness.

But when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord set up a standard, around which the friends of order, virtue and religion were ready to gather. After a quarter of a century of violent commotion among the nations, universal peace ensued, which has been of longer duration than any other that has existed since the commencement of the Christian era. God was pleased before the close of those troublous times to pour out his Spirit upon ministers, churches, and people very extensively, and greatly to revive his work, especially in this land. He has done great things for Zion and for the world, by disposing his people to engage in so many Christian and philanthropic enterprises, upon which he has so manifestly set the seal of his approbation. While these enterprises have greatly increased the labors and responsibilities of Christian ministers, there is much occasion to praise God for them. It is among the chief reasons why I would wish to live yet longer, that I may see this glorious work of mercy spread, until all shall know the Lord, and that I might work together with him and his faithful servants in helping

it forward. But I would be thankful for what of his grace I have been allowed to see, and in respect to the future I would say, "The will of the Lord be done." In this paragraph I have wandered from the path I had proposed for myself, and will now return.

It is worthy of our special and most grateful acknowledgment, my brethren and friends, that while so many disastrous changes have taken place around us, it has pleased God to preserve this church and society, and their pastor in a state of so much harmony, for so long a time. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." True, my conscience testifies that it has always been my study to promote peace and brotherly love, and to allay existing difficulties. But I take less of the honor to myself, than I concede to the people. There has ever been with them a settled aversion to a rupture with their minister, believing it to be among the greatest evils in society. They have chosen rather to bear with many imperfections, and to make little of that of which they might have made much. Where all parties sincerely aim at peace, there can be no contention.

As one evidence of our peaceful state it may be stated, that until within three years there was no parish, or religious society in this place. The business pertaining to parochial concerns was transacted in open town meeting, and carried into effect by officers of the town, as from the commencement of my ministry. There is reason to believe that the last remnant of union between church and state, in Massachusetts, and if so in the nation, was finally and forever sundered, when this parish was organized.

Another circumstance showing the character of this people, as a religious community, is worthy of notice in these days. I refer to the number of persons in town whose estates, by the voluntary consent of the owners, help sustain the gospel by taxation. As an example, the first year after the parish was formed—three years ago, about six-sevenths of the property in town was assessed to support Congregational preaching. This includes, however, several estates that pay in neighboring parishes, it being more convenient for the owners to attend there than here. My salary was assessed on a valuation of \$448,000, owned principally by between eighty and ninety farmers. Of the one-seventh who did not pay a parish tax, there was one Baptist and a few Methodists who helped to sustain their own institutions in their own way. Of the residue I can give no account.

This church has not been exempt from ordinary trials. We have been under the painful necessity of excluding from our communion numbers, who either renounced the faith they professed when they united with us, or ceased to maintain a Christian character. But no serious divisions were ever occasioned in the church by these proceedings. We were never asked to have those proceedings reviewed by a higher tribunal. Three ecclesiastical councils have been convened in this place, but they were for the purpose of ordaining pastors over the church. It is believed there has been no suspension of the Lord's supper, nor of preaching for a single Sabbath, on account of any existing difficulty among the members, since the formation of the church, which was in 1754. To

those acquainted with the difficulties and trials which many, perhaps I ought to say most, meet with in their ministry, it cannot appear strange that I should add, that I am deeply penetrated with a sense of the very gracious manner in which God has been pleased to deal with me, from the beginning to the present time. Not only have my trials been small, but I have enjoyed great happiness with my people. There has never, to my knowledge, been any combined opposition to myself, or to such measures as I have deemed proper to pursue for the advancement of religion. But rather, there has been a disposition to aid in carrying such measures into effect. I am always received in the families, into which I enter, with apparent and I trust real cordiality. My people have shown me more respect than was my due.

In relation to my domestic concerns, God has been very merciful to me and mine. He has spared the wife of my youth, until we have both arrived to a good old age, though as you well know, for the last four years, her strength has been small and her sufferings great. Nothing could have been more gratifying to her feelings, than to have been present on this occasion. Though not here in body, yet in spirit she is with us. Of eight children, six yet survive, who I rejoice to say, are all present, as also their companions, and a goodly number of their children. The two that have deceased had arrived to adult age. One was in single life, the other the head of a family, whose surviving companion is present.

I have also been greatly favored in respect to my bodily health. Although I possess a constitution nat-

urally feeble, yet I have generally enjoyed strength sufficient to enable me to perform the various duties and labors, which in the providence of God, have fallen to my lot. For the last thirty-four years especially, having been previously raised from dangerous sickness, I have very rarely failed of being at the post of duty, through bodily infirmity. I must make an exception of five Sabbaths in an early part of the past summer, when I was unable to perform ministerial duty among my people.

I desire to be thankful, that I have not long since been laid aside as a worn out garment. While I speak of these things, especially the kindness of those whom I serve in the Lord, it is a subject of painful consciousness that I have not been more faithful to them, and done more to promote their eternal interests.

(Here a brief respite was taken, while the following stanzas were read by the pastor, and sung by the choir, in the tune, " SIDDIM.")

“ God of my childhood, and my youth,
 The guide of all my days,
 I have declared thy heavenly truth,
 And told thy wondrous ways.

Wilt thou forsake my hoary hairs,
 And leave my fainting heart?
 Who shall sustain my sinking years,
 If God my strength depart?

Let me thy power and truth proclaim
 To the surviving age ;
 And leave the savor of thy name,
 When I shall quit the stage.

The land of silence and of death
 Attends my next remove ;
 O may these poor remains of breath
 Teach the wide world thy love.”

Having taken a review of scenes that have passed away, many of which must be interesting to those whom I more particularly address, let us now turn and look to the future.

Although we can see nothing before us with distinctness, time and circumstance being wholly concealed from our vision, yet we know that important changes await us. As I am now the oldest minister in the state, of the Congregational denomination, who has the entire charge of a church and parish, reason teaches that I can be with you but a short time. Soon shall I be called to give account of the manner in which I shall have fulfilled the ministry which I received of the Lord. The Lord show mercy in that day!

Whenever a people are left destitute of a minister, it is attended with more or less hazard. It is equally certain also that a number in this church, and in this society, of nearly my own standing in age, who have been firm supporters of the gospel, and ready to every good work which had relation to our common welfare, who have stood "shoulder to shoulder," in times of difficulty or danger,—men of prudence, wealth and influence, must soon have their names enrolled with my own, among the dead. We must lay aside our armor nearly at the same time. These changes will be felt. I will not say with the apostle, when speaking with reference to a particular people, "I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." I will not allow myself to believe it.

Though great reverses do sometimes occur, yet I

trust that the God of peace, who has so long continued his favor, will dwell among you and bless you, when the changes spoken of shall have taken place. He has promised to Zion, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children." May this precious promise be eminently verified with you. May the sons of these fathers fill the breach that will soon be made by death. May they be in their stead, not only by coming into possession of the houses, lands and treasures which will be left to them, but by adopting and carrying out the views and principles which they early imbibed, and to which they adhered with great steadfastness and consistency.

In view of these considerations, the preparation of this house of worship is a most seasonable enterprize, and its completion affords just occasion for mutual congratulation and of united praise to Him who caused the people to prepare their hearts to the work. It was much needed for our immediate comfort; and it provides for an exigency which must occur at no distant day. I trust it will be a bond of union to this parish, and serve to preserve it from those unhappy divisions which we have witnessed in most of the religious societies around us, and which have been productive of unnumbered social, as well as moral evils, in every community where they have prevailed.

And now the hour has arrived which you have appointed for the dedication of this house to the service of God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as a place for the worship of his great name. I hope, my friends, you will prepare your hearts for this solemn transaction, in the dedicatory prayer that will be offered at

the close of this discourse. Let us remember that the God with whom we have to do requireth truth in the inward parts. Although this duty specially concerns the people who expect to worship here, we wish and believe we shall have the sympathy and the prayers of all our Christian friends, in this interesting transaction.

It affords me great satisfaction, that I am allowed to see you assembled in this very commodious and pleasant house of worship, and to anticipate with you the rich blessings which may here descend upon you and your offspring. May the God of Abraham, and your fathers' God, always meet you here, when you assemble to call upon his name and to humble yourselves before him. May the glory of the latter house be greater than that of the former. In that we were permitted peacefully to assemble about forty-four years. And as you have heard, the gospel preached was the power of God unto salvation to a goodly number of precious souls. Of this and that man, it may be said, "He was born there." In that house some hundreds confessed Christ before men. There the church sat together as in heavenly places, as they commemorated that love which many waters cannot quench, nor floods drown. The remembrance of these affecting scenes calls for unfeigned gratitude to God.

But for this house in its modified state, we ask for greater things. May the gospel of salvation be preached with greater effect, and be a means, through God's blessing, of life to all who shall enter these gates in search of the wisdom that is from above. May you often see in this middle aisle, many consecrating themselves to the service of God, until the

church and the congregation shall be one body. May the Lord pour his Spirit upon you and your children, and make you his heritage forever.

There are two subjects about which I have much solicitude.

The first respects the condition in which I may leave you, when my labors shall cease. It is my most earnest desire and prayer to God, that this church and society may then be in a united and prosperous state. The thought that here may be the seat of discord—that you may be rent into parties, or involved in difficulties that will remain to be settled under the ministry of a stranger, perhaps a young man—is extremely painful. And next to this, I should reckon as ruinous, a falling off of the members of the society,—a withdrawal of a support of gospel institutions. Far distant be that day, when in passing through this pleasant town, there shall be occasion for the frequent remark, “The man who owns this well cultivated farm, or dwells in that stately mansion, renders no support to religion.” I would deprecate the thought of contributing to such a state of things in a town like this, by too long a continuance in the labors of the ministry. With your present union, here will be an inviting situation, to the one whom you may choose to supply my place. But if your union shall be gone, your glory as a religious community will also have departed.

Let the church be of a meek and lowly mind, be wise as the serpent and harmless as the dove, and pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance, and God will surely bless you.

I have spoken of a successor. As a people need great wisdom, in so important a concern, I will make one remark, which may possibly be of some use. The remark is, that far less is made of choosing a pastor at this day, than was the case fifty years ago. I had preached eleven or twelve sabbaths as a candidate in this place, before any movement was made by the church in respect to a call to settle. I was here about five months before my installation took place. In two other instances in which I had received an invitation to settle, the time of probation was still longer, before a call was given. It was generally so at that day. The settlement of a minister was a matter of so much importance in the people's view, that they dared not make haste. Full time ought to be taken by a church and society to satisfy themselves as to the native powers, the acquirements, the disposition, the habits, the faith, and especially the piety of their candidate, before they invite him to become their pastor.

The other subject to which I alluded is of still greater importance, namely, how shall we stand as minister and people in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

There we shall meet, including not only you who are present, but all who have ever sat under my ministry, whether they be now among the living or the dead. Yes, we shall there stand face to face. And shall we be a crown of rejoicing to each other? A momentous question! I do indulge the pleasing hope of seeing many to whom I have ministered, then standing on the right hand of the Savior, clothed in

white robes, with palms in their hands, and crowns of glory upon their heads. "Ye are our joy, our hope, our crown of rejoicing; in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming." Without this hope I should faint.

But will it be, *can* it be, that some of the dear people with whom I have so long labored and for whom I have so often prayed, will not be there? Must I see any of you in that other assembly, whose doom angels cannot contemplate without weeping, and over which the Savior wept?

Nothing gives me more pain, as I view the time of returning my commission to preach the gospel to be so near, than the consideration that there are some whose kindness and friendship I have enjoyed, who have been habitual attendants on the usual means of grace, who have appeared to entertain a high respect for the institutions of the gospel, but do not account themselves worthy of a place among the professed disciples of Christ. In view of our final meeting in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming, "I beseech you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." May you lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time of need.

To all, *all* of my beloved people, I would express the earnest desire and hope of meeting you in glory, through the riches of divine grace. God forbid that I should cease to pray for you, and warn and teach you in all wisdom, so long as I live, that I may present every man, yes, *every one of you*, perfect in Christ Jesus. And in return, let me always have an interest in your prayers.

And now, may the good will of him that dwelt in the bush ever be with you.

“ The Lord bless you and keep you.”

The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace”—*eternal peace.*

To all from abroad, who have honored this occasion with their presence, our thanks are due. It is particularly gratifying to see so many of the sons and daughters of New Braintree return to the place of their early associations, once more to exchange salutations with each other, after so long an absence, and from distant parts of the country. Not a few do I recognize as the lambs of this flock in former years, whom it was my delight to feed with the sincere milk of the word. It recalls to remembrance the time of your espousal to Christ, when a new song was put into your mouths, even praise to God. It will be a subject of eternal gratitude if in the time of your deep anxiety for your souls, God was pleased to make me the humble instrument of leading you to the Rock that is higher than you. I hope to have opportunity, in another part of this house, at least to take you all by the hand, and to express my joy on meeting you again. All who ever sat under my ministry, either in childhood, in youth, or in manhood, I do affectionately bear on my heart, and I pray that God may bless you with his richest favors, temporal and spiritual.

My brethren in the ministry, have always received a cordial welcome at my house. Your society and

friendship have been a source of more pleasure to me than I can describe. The gratification which I derive from your presence on this occasion is unusually great. It helps to sustain me, in view of the affecting considerations to which our attention has been directed.

Now that I am in the decline of life, when not only strength but judgment fails, I need your sympathies; I need your counsels; I need your prayers: do not forget me.

And the Lord be with *you*. May he spare you all to your people, many years, prosper you in your good work, and give you the reward of faithful servants.

This is a great meeting. I can hardly account for the number in attendance. But what is it, either in number or object, compared with that in which we shall all be assembled in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming, and receive a reward, each according to the deeds done in the body? May we all be prepared to join the redeemed throng in the words, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, AMEN."

A P P E N D I X.

(A.)

At the time I received license to preach, which was May 6th, 1791, at Hadley, by the Northern Association, in the county of Hampshire, I was ordained at their request, for the purpose of spending a season in Seneca, New York. The second time I preached was in what is now the town of Geneva, consisting then of five or six log cabins, and one or two framed buildings.

(B.)

The person deceased was Saul Job; the prayer was offered by Mr. Elijah Norton.

(C.)

Dea. Jonathan Gould, Capt. Thomas Whipple, and Mr. Jacob Pepper took an active part in my settlement, and their great grandchildren are now on the stage. Of the latter person named there is one of the fourth generation.

(D.)

Educated Men.	Ministers.	Lawyers.
Jonathan Gould.	Jonathan Gould.	
James Tufts.	James Tufts.	
Joseph Delano.		
Edwards Whipple.	Edwards Whipple.	
Luther Wilson.	Luther Wilson.	
Thomas Pope.		Thomas Pope.

Educated Men.	Ministers.	Lawyers.
Frederick Matthews.		Frederick Matthews.
Luke Foster.	Luke Foster.	
Henry Penniman.		
Charles Eames.		Charles Eames.
Frederick Whipple.		Frederick Whipple.
Waldo Converse.		Waldo Converse.
Eli Harrington.	Eli Harrington.	
Charles Bowman.		Charles Bowman.
William Miller.	William Miller.	

(<i>Died in College.</i>)	James Woods.
Joseph Washburn.	Dr. Davis.
William Penniman.	

(<i>Now in College.</i>)	
David Burt.	
George H. Gould.	

The exercises on the occasion were as follows:—

1. SINGING [Chant] “See what a living Stone,” &c.
2. SHORT PRAYER AND READING THE SCRIPTURES, by Rev. Levi Packard, of Spencer.
3. SINGING [122d Psalm, as in the Bible.] “I was glad,” &c.
4. PRAYER, by Dr. Bates, of Dudley.
5. HYMN [“The House of God.”]
6. SERMON, first part.
7. SINGING, 71st Psalm, third part.
8. SERMON, second part.
9. DEDICATORY PRAYER, by Dr. Snell, of North Brookfield.
10. SINGING [Chant] 87th Psalm, as in the Bible.
11. CLOSING PRAYER, by Rev. Joseph Vaill, of Somers, Conn.
12. SINGING, “Praise to Jehovah,” with the Doxology, in Long Metre.
13. BENEDICTION, by Rev. Micah Stone, of South Brookfield.



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N. MANCHESTER,
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